

The Hunger of the Famished

Grandma floats
over the stovetop—
a cloud of light
Edges of her soiled robe
skim the kitchen floors

I sit by her side
small like a child
I'm all mouth—
the rest of the body
an afterthought

Please forgive me for always
thinking about food
Jittery jewels of meat jelly
laced with fat, jam-topped pancakes
blossoming out

From you I've learned how to
reuse matches, divide
a cake, and grow
another body
inside my own

In your tiny home
I devour all
I'm served, the third eye
of my belly button
seeing what you see

stacks of limbs
thin as firewood
on the side of the street
as your mother's hand
shields your eyes

To this day
a stash of rice
underneath a floorboard
In your drawer, like a memento,
a piece of bread

Siberian Transit

Freight cars, barely any stops. Rising
stench. Some say,
We'll get shot in the woods.
Others say, They'll waste us away
building dams, roads.
Nobody knows.

It's all happening
now & now—a shard
of my mother's soul
throbbing inside my throat.

As she speaks, she hands me a shot glass,
the convex meniscus of moonshine
shuddering with the train's
clickety-clack.

Me, I say, I too got a dowry:
strangers with kids
lined up by the track. *Maybe*
they're getting extra rations
for the winter, I think
in my mother's place. Never looking them
in the eye, I feign—and don't feign—
indifference.

We drink until it gets light outside
and the trees in the window frame read
like lines
from a poem in a language
waiting to be revived.

In the narrow corridor, I squeeze past
men in uniforms, brush shoulders
with refugees, clutching at
passport & cash stuffed inside
my pants, as a Rom with a soiled sack
gives me a sidelong glance.

What are we to each other but a chance
at a rhyme jingles a line
in my ear, as I lean over the toilet
throwing up.